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“Auto-Education” as Understood by Students of Pedagogy and their Individual Auto-Educational Goals

Abstract

The main aim of the research was to determine the way of understanding the notion of “auto-education” by students of pedagogy and recognizing the material content of the formulated auto-educational goals. The main research tools which were applied in the research included a diagnostic survey and an auditorium questionnaire. The research results reveal that the notion of auto-education is present in the students’ perception as four ideas: auto-education as self-education; self-education and self-upbringing; self-upbringing and learning about oneself. In the process of auto-education, the respondents formulated goals concerning gaining knowledge, developing intellectual skills and specialist abilities, goals concerning biological, bodily dimensions of human life; goals referring to the development of one’s own spirituality, axiological inner life, searching for meaning in life and aims concerning self-discovery.

Key words: *auto-education; aims in the process of auto-education, academic didactics.*

Introduction

The research presented in this article reflects on the issues of auto-education from the perspective of academic didactics. The main aim of the research was to determine the way in which students of pedagogy define the notion of “auto-education.” Moreover, another major concern of this research was to find out whether and what kind of objectives they formulate in the process of auto-education undertaken by

them. As far as the latter issue is concerned, the chief purpose was to learn the material content of auto-educational aims and their subjective meaning to the respondents.

The main research tools which were applied in the research included the method of a diagnostic survey and the technique of an auditorium questionnaire directed to 120 students of the full-time pedagogical course, at the faculties of social pedagogy and social rehabilitation. The research was conducted in the academic year 2008/2009. The designed questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, one sentence formed as a question aimed at provoking a certain verbal response in the respondents. This sentence was of a declarative character and read as follows: *"I would like to know how you understand the notion of 'auto-education.'"* The second part of the questionnaire concerned the material content of the goals. The respondents' task was to specify auto-educational goals that they wished to fulfill. Each of the subjects could give an unlimited number of goals depending on their choice. The questionnaire included an introductory instruction informing the respondents about the aim of the research and explaining the way of answering the questions. In this part the respondents were also assured of the anonymity of the research.

Further part of this paper includes presentation of the research results. In the first place, the author presented how the students of pedagogy who participated in the research perceived the notion of "auto-education".

"Auto-education" as perceived by students of pedagogy

The notion of "auto-education" is understood differently by the representatives of various scientific disciplines such as educationalists, sociologists, psychologists. The term "auto-education" is often associated with such concepts as: self-education, self-teaching, self-improvement, auto-creation, self-upbringing. It is possible to notice that auto-education is mainly used as a notion with two meanings: a narrower sense, related to education, and a broader one, referring to self-realization. In the former meaning, auto-education is perceived as a process of self-teaching, whose aims, content, means, sources, forms and methods are selected by the learner. It is the learner who exercises self-control and performs self-assessment. [cf. e.g.: Okoń W., 2003, p.155; Kupisiewicz Cz., 2005, p.27; Pólturzycki J., 2002, pp.209–210; Wróblewska W., 2005, p.381]. In the latter, broader sense, auto-education is considered equivalent to the process of self-development harmonizing with one's motivation, referring to the development of the whole personality, including the development of the mental sphere, i.e. independent learning. [continued by: Matwijów B.,

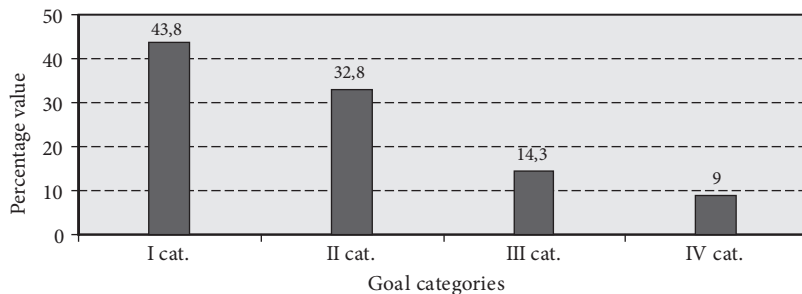
1994, p.113]. In this approach, three essential features of auto-education are most frequently emphasized. These are: intentionality and social rationality; autonomy; intensity and durability. Therefore, the process of auto-education becomes the kind of process that is authentically subjective and autonomously oriented by the subject of development. [cf. e.g.: Jankowski Dz., 2004, p. 108]. However, it is important to notice that some authors express skeptical opinions on auto-education, claiming that a human being possesses a small development reserve which can be used during the self-improvement process. Auto-education can also take a destructive, or even pathological form, for instance as a result of a family dysfunction, destructive models drawn from the mass media, anti-cultural peer groups and other sources. Therefore, such an important role is attributed to the process of education where the development of auto-educational aspirations should go in line with the formation of autobiographical motivation and an appropriate system of values which allow an individual to act in a constructive and optimally creative way throughout the entire lifetime. [cf. e.g.: Łukaszewski W., 1984, pp. 272, 391; Dudzikowa M., 1993, p. 46].

Let us investigate now how the notion of auto-education is understood by the students of pedagogy who took part in the research. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to provide an answer to an open question. They were asked to present their own way of understanding the term "auto-education." A thorough analysis and assessment of the obtained empirical material rendered it possible to distinguish four main ways of understanding this notion. (Table 1).

Table 1. "Auto-education" as understood by the students participating in the research

Categories of comments	Numerical data	Data in %, N=143 of all obtained answers
Auto-education as a process of self-reliant and independent learning. Self-education.	78	54.5%
Auto-education as self-education and self-upbringing	35	24.5%
Auto-education as a process of one's personality development. Self-upbringing	12	8.4%
Auto-education as learning about oneself, gaining knowledge about oneself	18	12.6%

Source: the author's own study (on the basis of data obtained by means of a questionnaire)

Chart 1: Pedagogy students' individual autoeducational goals**Key:**

CATEGORY I: Goals concerning gaining knowledge, improving intellectual skills and specialist abilities;

CATEGORY II: Goals concerning the biological and bodily dimension of human life;

CATEGORY III: Goals concerning the development of one's spirituality, axiological inner life, searching for the meaning of life;

CATEGORY IV: Goals concerning self-discovery.

Source: the author's own study (on the basis of the data obtained by means of a questionnaire)

The students who participated in the research presented mostly a narrow way of understanding auto-education by considering it equivalent to self-education understood as a process of self-teaching, whose aims, content, forms, methods are selected by the learner. The majority of the respondents associate auto-education with independent, unassisted acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as with the cognitive sphere of a human being. This can be proved by the following comments expressed by the respondents: *"Auto-education is a process of an individual's self-education, gaining knowledge, broadening one's intellectual horizons;"* *"Auto-education means development of one's knowledge, extending it, forming new mental structures, discovering new information of one's own free will. I as a teacher, guide;"* *"Auto-education is a conscious process undertaken by an individual with the aim of developing their own cognitive abilities."* From this perspective, the characteristic feature of auto-education is the independence and self-reliance of an individual in relation to both process planning and process realization as well as freedom and awareness of one's own goal. This is how the students who participated in the research perceived this issue: *"Auto-education is a conscious decision to broaden one's knowledge individually, through work on one's own initiative;"* *"(...) a person sets himself educational goals and achieves them by self-initiated actions;"* *"Auto-education means self-education, an independent, self-reliant, carefully planned process of broadening one's knowledge, triggered by one's own initiative. It also involves exercising one's abilities and developing one's own mental powers."* However, accord-

ing to some respondents, auto-education understood as a process of self-education may occur *"with somebody's help, under somebody's tutelage,"* it may also be initiated by a teacher who, by offering guidelines and instructions, *"helps learners identify a direction in which they are going to conduct the search."* It can also be observed at different courses, workshops, training provided that *"a decision to take part in these events is conscious, voluntary, without any top-down obligation."*

Consequently, auto-education is understood by the students as a clearly intentional process which is directed at gaining new knowledge, broadening the scope of the already existing knowledge and acquiring new abilities. For the majority of the respondents, this is the main goal of this process which concerns *"going deeper into the content of an interest to an individual for the sake of pure satisfaction derived from learning it."* It is connected with intrinsic motivation, *"it arises from an inner drive to learn about new things, phenomena, concepts."* However, the analysis and assessment of the research material implies that knowledge and abilities may also constitute an indirect goal leading to the development of personality, interests, creation of one's own outlook on life, increase in tolerance, development of one's career. The aforementioned statement can be illustrated by the following comments expressed by the respondents: *"Auto-education as education of oneself leads to the acquisition of knowledge, thanks to which it is possible to achieve personality development;" "Auto-education broadens mental horizons, allows an individual to form their own opinion rather than accept the knowledge offered by other people...;" "Auto-education creates favourable conditions for development, 'extension' of one's own viewpoint, openness to other views, which favours greater tolerance;" "(...) it is possible to acquire knowledge 'for oneself,' but also knowledge that is useful in a professional life. Without this it is hard to think about a professional career."* What is more, in the process of independent and self-reliant acquisition of knowledge individuals set themselves certain requirements, whose aim is to *"make an individual a well-educated and eloquent person who is knowledgeable about the contemporary world."*

Some of the respondents rightly noticed that auto-education is a continuous process and should last for the entire lifetime. One person claimed that auto-education can only be used with reference to adults. Unfortunately, this opinion was not supported by any justification. This view corresponds to the opinion of those educationalists who believe that auto-education is significant for a person only in their adulthood after gaining a satisfactory level of self-knowledge and defining their social and moral conduct that constitutes a condition for critical self-assessment. [Jankowski Dz., 2004, p. 109 and p. 129].

The group of the respondents considered auto-education equivalent not only to self-education, but also the process of developing one's personality, self-upbringing. It was rarely perceived as an independent category. Instead, it was most frequently seen as a complement to the first way of the understanding of the notion of "auto-education": "(...) *auto-education consists of: self-education (...) and self-upbringing understood as striving to develop one's personality;*" *"independent and self-reliant work on one's own initiative aiming at achieving defined educational goals as well as work on one's own character."* Auto-education as self-upbringing, the process of personality development, was perceived by the respondents in two different dimensions, dependent on will, aspirations and actions, referring to working on oneself, one's character and improvement. Regarding this issue, the students' comments were very general and brief. A more profound understanding of auto-education perceived as self-upbringing and personality development can be found in the second part of the research focusing on the presentation of individual auto-educational goals.

More elaborated and interesting comments were found in the last category of the understanding of auto-education as a process of learning about oneself, gaining knowledge about oneself. According to the respondents, the essence of auto-education in this approach is getting to know oneself, obtaining information about oneself from other people, and by means of auto-reflection, through gaining an insight into one's mental life and psychological conditions. The way the notion of auto-education was understood in this category was strictly related to the precise auto-educational goals defined by the respondents in the second part of the research. These issues will be discussed in detail in further part of the article.

To sum up, let us briefly present the results of the research on the way of understanding the notion of auto-education by the students of pedagogy who participated in the research. According to the respondents, auto-education means:

self-education, the process of independent learning:

- – learner, the subject, determines all elements of this process, including self-control and self-assessment;
- – the basic elements of the process of self-education are knowledge and abilities which can constitute the aim itself, or they can be an indirect goal, leading to the development of personality, interests, tolerance, outlook on the world, career;
- – this process has an individual character, but it does not exclude the role of the teacher who may initiate and direct it;
- – it is a continuous process and it can last a lifetime;
- – it can take place in a certain human development phase (adulthood);

self-upbringing, the process of personality development:

- – working on oneself;
- – striving to develop oneself;

learning about oneself, gaining knowledge about oneself:

- – getting to know oneself through auto-reflection, gaining an insight into one's mental life, psychological states, and obtaining information about oneself from others;
- – gaining knowledge about one's emotions, abilities, reactions in different situations in life;

In accordance with psycho-transgressionism, a psychological concept of man, a human being is considered to be a relatively self-steerable system. People are 'originators' of their behaviour, focused on their inner and outer development. As intentional individuals, they formulate various aims constituting an anticipated state of affairs which is perceived as a carrier of potential values and meanings. [Kozielecki J., 2001, pp.22–23]. In the process of auto-education, individuals also set themselves certain aims, whose accomplishment often results in changing the limits of one's abilities, namely excelling oneself.

Let us see now whether the participants in the research formulate their auto-educational goals and what material content of these objectives is.

Pedagogy students' individual auto-educational goals

In order to identify the pedagogy students' individual auto-educational goals, in the second part of the survey questionnaire the respondents were asked to provide an unlimited number of auto-educational goals which they wished to attain. Out of 120 respondents, 83 identified their auto-educational goals. This constitutes 69.1% of the overall public participating in the research. Consequently, 37 respondents (30.8% of the respondent body) did not have any auto-educational aims. It may be assumed that these subjects are not involved in the process of auto-education, or the research itself was not as strong an incentive for them to make reflections on their own auto-educational actions and indicate the goals formulated in their scope. Some of the young people who participated in the research wrote down in the questionnaire (part II) that the questions are interesting, but they had not given much thought to this issue yet, nor had they had many opportunities to discuss auto-education in their lives. However, those who made an effort to indicate their own auto-educational goals did not limit themselves to providing only one objective. As a result, the obtained empirical material concerned 671 auto-educational

goals. The next stage involved categorizing the content of the goals. It was possible to distinguish four categories of auto-educational goals (Table 1).

The first category (the greatest number of goals indicated by the respondents) includes goals referring to: gaining or broadening the knowledge of general pedagogy and didactics; creation of one's own methodological techniques connected with the future professional career; gaining and improving specialist skills concerning the future professional career; developing intellectual skills necessary to "*acquire the educational material required in the university course more efficiently*" (memory, attention, logical thinking). In this category the outstanding prevalence was given the goals aimed at obtaining precise knowledge and skills viewed as professional training, preparation for the future professional career. The respondents declared their willingness to upgrade their skills throughout their entire lifetime. They seemed to be aware of the fact that in order to find and keep a job for their entire life they would be made to broaden their scope of knowledge concerning the discipline in which they would be involved, mainly through self-education work. It is possible to note that the young people who value the possibility of personal development see a chance to fulfill their ambitions on the professional grounds by getting a quick promotion, making professional careers, winning recognition. However, they realize that achieving professional success is connected with auto-education, sparing no effort, continuous upgrading of professional qualifications and acquiring new competences.

The second category in relation to the number of the goals listed by the students, referring to the biological and bodily dimension of human life, included goals concerning mainly care for one's health condition ("*maintaining good health condition,*" "*improvement of physical condition,*" "*establishing new eating habits – healthy food,*" "*giving up smoking,*" "*drinking less alcohol*") and improvement of one's appearance ("*lose weight!*", "*systematically follow slimming and weight loss programmes,*" "*silhouette improvement,*" "*change one's appearance, find one's own style of dressing*"). Goals included in this category were characterized by different levels of generality. Most frequently, they took a form of a slogan without a broader interpretation of the material content. Nevertheless, attempts were made to indicate precise ways of achieving these goals, e.g. going to the gym or going swimming regularly, contacting a dietitian, identifying shops selling healthy food, etc.

The goals concerning the development of one's spirituality, axiological inner life, searching for the meaning of life were rarely mentioned in the respondents' comments. However, they were most elaborate and were supported by justification. In this category it is possible to distinguish main religious objectives referring to deepening faith, strengthening the inner spiritual life, gaining religious experience

and understanding (*"feeling God's presence," "establishing a direct relationship with God"*), *"being an active member of a religious community."* The students participating in the research wrote: *"My greatest desire is to find inner peace, harmony, feel God's grace and love," "Live life with God, develop spiritually – this is probably the core of my existence. Is there anything more important?" "I must deepen my faith. Now I am not pleased with myself as I want to be an evangelizer."* The results obtained in the research seem to prove the thesis that these days tradition, a myth, religion are increasingly important elements constituting the sense of identity and meaning for many people.

The third category also includes goals which are not directly related with religion, but they refer to the development of oneself, one's personality, most frequently through:

- being useful to others, helping those in need, taking part in charity activities. The following comments can serve as the best illustration of this attitude: *"I would like to help disabled people, but it is difficult for me at the moment..."*, *"this year I have become a volunteer worker in a children's hospital... this is what matters to me. By helping others, especially children, I am becoming a different, definitely better person,"* and through:
- *"taking part in cultural life,"* learning about tradition, shaping culture (*"develop an artistic talent, open an exhibition of my works"*).

The fourth category concerning self-discovery included such goals as: *"gaining an insight into my mental states," "learning the systematics of my own behaviour in different situations in life," "obtaining knowledge about myself, my emotions and abilities."* At the same time, the respondents pointed out the usefulness of such knowledge in respect to the formation of interpersonal relations, 'functioning in social life in a more efficient way' (performing social roles). Simultaneously, for the respondents, the knowledge about themselves becomes the first step to self-reliance, change or modification of undesirable, inappropriate forms of behaviour deeply rooted in their mentality. Consequently, it may be viewed as an introductory stage to the process of working on oneself, improving one's personality. From this perspective, the goals connected with self-discovery may be viewed as sub-goals, i.e. instrumental goals leading to the accomplishment of final aims referring to the development of oneself.

Many authors emphasize the role of self-discovery in controlling one's development. People need an appropriate theory of themselves. They seek information enabling them to diagnose correctly their skills and abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Subjective, accurate auto-perception allows an individual to function effectively and adjust themselves to a social environment. [Dymkowski M.,

1993, p.29]. On the basis of the results obtained in the research, it is possible to observe that a scant number of the respondents were oriented at self-discovery in the process of auto-education undertaken by them. It was this category where the smallest number of auto-educational goals was observed (only 9.09% of all the goals indicated by the students). In addition to that, the respondents concentrated mainly on finding an answer to the question: “what am I like?” or alternatively: “why am I the way I am?”. However, deep self-discovery requires providing answers to further questions, such as: “what is my formative environment like?” “what variants of further life and development are possible in my case?”. This knowledge constitutes an essential element of human biographic competence [Pietrasinski Z., 1988, pp. 100–101 and 111–113], which is an indispensable condition for the occurrence of an intentional auto-education understood as a process involving the development of the whole personality.

Summarizing the fragment of the article concerning auto-educational goals, it is possible to note that the students of pedagogy who participated in the research are oriented at achieving the following goals in the undertaken process of auto-education:

concerning the intellectual sphere:

- gaining or broadening the knowledge of general pedagogy and didactics;
- creating one's own methodological techniques connected with the future professional career;
- gaining and improving specialist skills concerning the future professional career;
- developing intellectual skills (memory, attention, logical thinking);

concerning the biological, bodily sphere:

- care for one's health condition, improvement of one's appearance;

concerning the spiritual sphere, searching for the meaning of life:

- religious goals: deepening faith, strengthening the inner spiritual life, gaining religious experience and understanding (religion as a sense-making factor);
- development of oneself through involvement in charity activities and participation in culture and its formation;

concerning self-discovery (knowledge about oneself necessary to form interpersonal relations and constituting a basis for personality development):

- gaining an insight into one's mental states;
- obtaining knowledge about oneself, one's emotions and abilities;
- discovering reasons behind the forms of behaviour displayed in different situations in life;

The research presented in this article does not exhaust the issues concerning auto-education in academic didactics. Owing to formal limitations, it was possible for the author to present two problems: the way of understanding the notion of 'auto-education' by the students of pedagogy and the respondents' declarations in respect to their individual auto-educational goals. A goal itself represents a state of affairs which is likely to occur owing to the subject's activity. It is directed towards the future. In order to make the vision of future states of affairs have a regulatory power in behaviour, it is necessary that a goal should be accompanied by specific methods of its realization. These means of accomplishment can be more or less complex. They can take a form of a generally outlined plan or precisely defined action programme. It seems justifiable to determine whether students recognize their auto-educational goals and what means of attaining their aims they indicate. While analyzing the students' auto-educational process, it is also worth giving some thought to the determinants of the course and effectiveness of the process as well as gaining an insight – by means of a qualitative methodological approach – into the sense and meaning assigned by the students to the process of auto-education [Cf. Wróblewska W., 2005, pp. 382–383].

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